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Practitioner Resource 1: Settings and Services of Prostitution and Sex Work in England and Wales

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**A practitioner resource summarising content from the 2019 Home
Office Report 'The nature and prevalence of prostitution and sex work
in England and Wales today'**

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Introduction

This resource provides an overview of the settings and services of prostitution and sex work that currently exist in England and Wales. It is based on research carried out by a team of researchers at the University of Bristol who were commissioned by the Home Office and the Office of the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner to report on the current 'nature' and 'prevalence' of prostitution in England and Wales. The research was carried out between May 2018 and June 2019 and used a working definition that took a broad view of the sex industry: *'Prostitution and/or sex work constitutes the provision of sexual or erotic acts or sexual intimacy in exchange for payment or other benefit or need'* (Hester et al., 2019, p.2).

As part of this research project, the team of researchers carried out a systematic search for relevant academic literature and other publications; conducted a public online survey; carried out follow-up in-depth email questionnaires with survey respondents who identified as currently or recently involved in prostitution and sex work; sent questionnaires to NGOs to administer to their services-users or members; and held consultations and discussions with a wide range of organisations. Based on this data, they developed a typology to describe and classify contemporary practices. The typology has two elements: six cross-cutting themes and fourteen settings and services. They also explored data sources for estimating the national prevalence of those involved in sex work and prostitution.

The researchers highlighted two groups whose voices were under-represented or absent within the research due to methodological and ethical constraints: (1) migrant sex workers; and (2) British and non-British individuals who are/were forcibly coerced, who are/were trafficked, who are/were sexually exploited and/or who are traumatised in relation to their experience.

As the research demonstrated, there is great diversity in opinion and experience when it comes to prostitution and sex work and the language people use tends to signify conflicting political, ideological or moral positions. However, there is also much common ground. This resource has been created out of a desire to find that common ground and move forward to challenge the status quo of how people in the sex industry are treated and to improve the quality of services available. To this end, this resource is aimed at practitioners involved in commissioning and delivering support services to those involved in the sex industry as well as professionals who come into contact with those who sell sex during the course of their work, such as police officers, housing providers, local authority departments etc. The language used in the resource reflects that used in the original research report.

Settings and Services

The following summarises the key features of the fourteen settings and services identified in the University of Bristol report: [The nature and prevalence of prostitution and sex work in England and Wales today \(Hester, Mulvihill, Matolcsi, Lanau Sanchez and Walker, 2019\).](#)

<p>Bar-based sex work and hostess bars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No hostess culture in England and Wales comparable with that found in East Asia • Some bars in London and elsewhere are described as 'hostess bars' and some services within 'gentleman's clubs' could be considered similar to hostess bar practices 	<p>BDSM, kink & fetish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles include professional dominant; professional submissive; and professional switch • Dominants generally female • Services may be provided online or in-person • Escorts and independents may also offer 'basic' BDSM practices • May not involve any intimacy, nudity or genital contact • Seen by sellers to provide potentially greater control over the transaction and higher fees • Described by participants as overwhelmingly White and middle class 	<p>Erotic and exotic dance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as stripping or striptease • Can include lap dancing; pole dancing; table dancing; strip shows; peep shows; and live sex shows • Often takes place in a 'Sexual Entertainment Venue' which requires a license to operate • Individuals may be attracted specifically to erotic dance; many may also move into escorting or offering full-service from home • Wide variety of working conditions and payment methods which are frequently problematic 	<p>Street and outdoor sex work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of individuals soliciting to sell sex, or providing sex, in outdoor locations but soliciting can also be online/via phone and sex acts can take place indoors • Most activity in the early morning and late afternoon • Normally paid in cash upfront but sex also exchanged for shelter, food and drugs/alcohol • Third party involvement may or may not be present • Mainly women (cis and trans) selling sex to men • Sellers will often have experienced acute circumstances in childhood or as adults
<p>Erotic massage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves sensual massage ending usually in masturbation of the client • Can form part of an individual's repertoire or can be offered as a distinct service • Perceived to be a 'safer' progression from, or additional practice for, escorts and independent workers 	<p>Escort: Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work alone, offer direct sexual services, may take in-calls and/or out-calls • Set their own prices, hours, service limitations and decide on which clients they see • Majority advertise online • May subcontract out aspects such as accounting • Bookings can last from 15 minutes to several days • Mainly women 	<p>Escort: Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May offer same services as independent escorts but almost always offer out-calls only • Agencies organise advertising, booking and handle payment • Concerns raised around levels of autonomy and commission charges 	<p>Pornography, glamour & erotica</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The depiction (through printed or visual media) of sexual subject matter with the explicit intention of stimulating sexual excitement • Can include performing in adult films; glamour photography and modelling; adult or erotic underwear modelling; clip making/clip producing; custom video making; sharing photos/nudes for sale

<p>Sex parties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events where attendees can engage in sexual experiences together in what is positioned as a safe and consenting environment • Includes swing clubs/parties; party and play which involves chemical sex; BDSM parties; invitation-only sex parties; weekend events often arranged in private homes; dogging, which increasingly involves couple and group sex in public or semi-public places, pre-arranged over the internet; and gangbangs, where a number of individuals have sex with one or more paid individuals 	<p>Sugar arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where one individual enters into what seems to be a mutually beneficial relationship with another, exchanging companionship and/or intimacy with economic security or benefit in kind • Commonly involves a younger woman (“sugar baby”) and an older man (“sugar daddy”) • Associated with students • Sex is usually involved • Particular risks related to lack of clarity around expectations 	<p>Telephone, Text-based, TV, Live voyeurism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone sex chat services mostly integrated with internet services now and seen as offering less earning potential • Instant messaging (IM) charged by messages received with prices varying on different platforms • TV phone-ins – interactive adult TV channels broadcasting live simulated sex or sexual conversation 	<p>Therapeutic services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remunerative aspect paired with physical sexual acts • Includes sexual surrogacy; sexual assistance; and sexological bodywork • Often advertised via online practitioner directories • Tend to be women working with male clients • Most work independently and alone • Usually (but not always) professionally qualified
<p>Webcamming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves a ‘cammer’ selling sexual acts and dialogue, videos and pictures to customers via websites dedicated to hosting webcam shows • Content streamed or pre-recorded videos uploaded • Can be group/public show or private show; set own prices and work for themselves; websites take a cut • Flexibility it provides seen as appealing; not commonly done full-time 	<p>Brothels, parlours & saunas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor premises where direct sexual services are provided for payment by more than one individual, either simultaneously or at different times • Multiple locations including residential homes, rented properties, holiday lets, licensed & unlicensed saunas, massage parlours etc. • Managed brothels: managed by a third-party; individuals work shifts ranging from 6-24 hours; may work once per week to 7 days per week; usually a receptionist/maid who takes bookings and screens clients; payment upfront and in cash; individuals pay a cut to the brothel, usually 40-60%, and may pay further fees to security and the maid • ‘Collaborative’ brothels: individuals selling sex share a flat or house with others selling sex, either concurrently or at different times, taking in-calls as escorts; may tour together, renting premises temporarily; aside from landlord or hotel, no third party managing the premises; usually organise own advertising and bookings but may employ someone to do this • Non-static managed brothels: escort agencies or individuals may also rent out flats to individuals selling sex and organise clients for them • In cases of trafficking, traffickers rent out mainly residential premises, including temporarily, keeping victims there to provide sexual services against their will, often moving them between premises 		

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Beyond the Streets

Beyond the Streets partners with women on their journey out of sexual exploitation. We want to see a world where people are free from sexual exploitation, and where those in prostitution have the option to pursue genuine alternatives. We work directly with women selling sex to support them to find routes out of prostitution as well as equipping and supporting other projects across the UK to tackle the sexual exploitation that happens in every community. To find out more about our work visit our website: www.beyondthestreets.org.uk.
Registered Charity Number: 1178421

This briefing forms part of a series of three publications:

Practitioner Resource 1: Settings and services of prostitution and sex work in England and Wales

Practitioner Resource 2: Understanding the sex industry in England and Wales

Practitioner Resource 3: Understanding existing prevalence data on the UK sex industry

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This resource was prepared in collaboration with Dr Katie Thorlby at Beyond the Streets.

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